

CONSTITUTION

OF A

SOCIETY

For abolishing

The SLAVE-TRADE.

• WITH

Several Acts of the Legislatures of the
States of *Massachusetts, Connecticut*
and *Rhode-Island*, for that Purpose.

PROVIDENCE:

Printed by JOHN CARTER. M,DCC,LXXXIX.



CONSTITUTION, &c.

IT having pleased the Creator of mankind to make of one blood all nations of men, and having, by the diffusion of his light, manifested, that however diversified by colour, situation, religion, or different states of society, it becomes them to consult and promote each other's happiness, as members of one great family : It is therefore the duty of those who profess to maintain their own rights, and especially those who acknowledge the obligations of Christianity, to extend, by the use of such means as are or may be in their power, the blessings of freedom to the whole human race ; and in a more particular manner to such of their fellow-creatures as by the laws and constitution of the United States are entitled to their freedom, and who by fraud or violence are or may be detained in bondage. And as, by the African slave-trade, a system of slavery, replete with human misery, is erected and carried on, it is incumbent on them to endeavour the suppression of that unrighteous commerce ; to excite a due observance of such good and wholesome laws as are or may be enacted for the abolition of slavery, and for the support of the rights of those who are entitled to freedom by the laws of the country in which they live ; and to afford such relief as we may be enabled to those unhappy fellow-citizens, who, like the sons of Africa, falling into the hands of unmerciful men, may be carried into slavery at Algiers or elsewhere.

From a conviction of these truths, and the obligation of these principles, and from a desire to diffuse them wherever the vices and miseries of slavery exist, and in humble reliance on the favour and support of the Father of mankind, the subscribers have formed themselves into a Society, under the title of *The Providence Society for abolishing the Slave-Trade.*—For effecting

fecting these purposes, they have adopted the following rules :

1st. The Society shall elect, by a majority of votes to be taken by ballot, a President, a Vice-President, one or more Counsellors, a Secretary, and a Treasurer, who shall respectively continue in office for one year from the time of their election; and at the expiration of every year succeeding, there shall be a new election of officers in the same manner.

2d. The President shall have authority to maintain order and decorum at the meetings of the Society, and to call a special meeting at any time, with the advice of three of the Standing Committee herein after named.

3d. The Vice-President, in the absence of the President, shall have the same authority as the President; and in case the President shall die or be displaced, the Vice-President shall officiate until a new President be chosen.

4th. The Secretary shall keep a record of the proceedings of the Society, in a book to be provided for that purpose, and shall cause to be published, from time to time, such part of the proceedings or resolutions as the Society may order, or the President with the Standing Committee between the meetings of the Society may think proper to direct.

5th. The Treasurer, if required by the Society, shall give security for the faithful discharge of the trust reposed in him, and shall keep regular accounts of the monies received and paid, observing always to pay no money without an order signed by the President, or a majority of a quorum of the Standing Committee, who are prohibited from drawing, between the stated meetings of the Society, for a larger sum than ten pounds, unless especially empowered by the Society at a previous meeting.

6th. If any of the officers above named shall resign or be displaced, the Society shall fill the vacancy in the mode prescribed by the first article; and if the President

sident and Vice-President, or Secretary, or Treasurer, be absent at any of the meetings, the Society may elect one to officiate *pro tempore*.

7th. The Society shall meet once in every quarter, that is to say, on the 3d sixth day in the 2d, 5th, 8th and 11th months in every year, at such place as shall from time to time be agreed upon, in order to receive the reports of the Standing Committee, and to devise the ways and means of accomplishing the objects of this institution.

8th. That nine members, with a President or Vice-President, constitutionally assembled, be a quorum of the Society for transacting business.

9th. Every member, after subscribing these rules, shall pay into the hands of the Treasurer two-thirds of a dollar, and at the commencement of every quarter one-sixth of a dollar; and all donations to the Society shall be made through the President, who shall pay them to the Treasurer, and report them to the Society at the next quarterly-meeting.

10th. Any citizen of the United States, who shall be recommended by two-thirds of the Standing Committee to a quarterly-meeting, shall be balloted for, and if approved by two-thirds of the members present, he shall be declared a member. The Committee of seven shall have authority to receive such members as may offer and subscribe before the next quarterly-meeting, this rule notwithstanding.

11th. Two-thirds of the members present at a quarterly-meeting shall have power to expel any person whom they may deem unworthy of remaining a member, and no person shall be a member who holds a slave, or is concerned in the slave-trade.

12th. It shall be the business of the Counsellors to explain the laws and constitutions of the States, which relate to the emancipation of slaves, and to the slave-trade. And, when it becomes necessary, to urge the due execution thereof, and their claims to freedom, before

before such persons or courts as are or may be authorized to decide on the same.

13th. A Standing Committee of seven members shall be appointed to transact the business in general, four of whom are empowered to act; whose duty it shall be to take the most effectual measures to accomplish the objects of this institution, agreeable to the direction and at the expence of the Society, and to report a particular account of their proceedings at the next quarterly-meeting, at which time two of their number shall be released from the service, in the order their names stand on the minutes, and the vacancy filled up by the same or two others appointed in their room, and in like manner a dismissal and appointment of two shall take place at each succeeding quarterly-meeting.

14th. The foregoing rules shall be in force without alteration six months, after which period they shall be subject to such alterations as two-thirds of the members present, at a quarterly-meeting, shall agree upon.

State of RHODE-ISLAND and PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS. *June Session, 1774.*

An ACT prohibiting the importation of Negroes into this colony.

WHEREAS the inhabitants of America are generally engaged in the preservation of their own rights and liberties, among which that of personal freedom must be considered as the greatest; and as those who are desirous of enjoying all the advantages of liberty themselves, should be willing to extend personal liberty to others:

Therefore be it enacted by this General Assembly, and by the authority thereof it is enacted, That for the future no Negro or Mulatto slave shall be brought into this colony: And in case any slave shall hereafter be brought in, he or she shall be and are hereby rendered immediately free, so far as respects personal freedom and
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the enjoyment of private property, in the same manner as the native Indians.

Provided nevertheless, That this law shall not extend to servants of persons travelling through this colony, who are not inhabitants thereof, and who carry them out with them when they leave the same.

Provided also, That nothing in this act shall extend, or be deemed to extend, to any Negro or Mulatto slave belonging to any inhabitant of either of the British colonies, islands or plantations, who shall come into this colony with an intention to settle or reside for a number of years therein; but such Negro or Mulatto, so brought into this colony by such person inclining to settle or reside therein, shall be and remain in the same situation, and subject in like manner to their master or mistress, as they were in the colony or plantation from whence they removed.

Provided nevertheless, That if any person so coming into this colony, to settle or reside as aforesaid, shall afterwards remove out of the same, such person shall be obliged to carry all such Negro or Mulatto slaves, as also all such as shall be born from them, out of the colony with them.

And to prevent any slave or slaves from being clandestinely brought into this colony, in order that they may be free and liable to become chargeable, *Be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid,* That all persons so offending shall be liable to and pay a fine of one hundred pounds, lawful money, for each and every one so brought in, to and for the use of the colony, to be recovered in the same manner that other fines and forfeitures usually are by the laws of this government. And also all persons who shall be convicted of receiving, harbouring or concealing, any such Negro or Mulatto slave within this colony, he or they so offending shall be liable to the like penalty, to be recovered and applied in the same manner. And such Negro or
Mulatto

Mulatto shall be sent out of the colony as other poor persons are by law.

State of RHODE-ISLAND and PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS. *October Session, 1779.*

An ACT prohibiting slaves being sold out of the State against their consent.

WHEREAS tolerating strangers to purchase Negro or Mulatto slaves in this State, and carry them off either by land or water against their consent, to perpetuate their slavery in foreign parts, remote from their friends and acquaintance, is against the rights of human nature, and tends greatly to aggravate the condition of slavery, which this General Assembly is disposed rather to alleviate, till some favourable occasion may offer for its total abolition: *Be it therefore enacted by this General Assembly, and by the authority thereof it is enacted,* That in case any stranger or foreigner, or any person or persons whoever, shall presume to purchase, and in consequence of such recent title, or of any other right, title or claim whatsoever, shall forcibly or fraudulently attempt to carry off, either by land or water, out of the bounds and jurisdiction of this State, against their consent, any Negro or Mulatto slave or slaves heretofore residing in this State, such attempt shall operate against the person or persons making the same, either by themselves or any other person or persons acting under them, and in their behalf, to a total defeazance and forfeiture of all their right, title or claim, to such slave or slaves.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That upon its being alledged and proved by such slave or slaves, or any other person in his or their behalf, before any one Justice of the Peace in this State, that such an attempt hath been made as aforesaid, it shall be in the power and become the duty of such Justice forthwith to give under his hand and seal, to such slave
or

or slaves, a certificate of his or their total emancipation; by virtue of which, such slave or slaves shall become forever thereafter as perfectly liberated from the power of the persons concerned in such attempt, as though he or they had never been in bondage.

And lest the said slaves should by fraud, threats or duress, be prevailed upon hastily to declare their consent to such sale and exportation, when at the same time, in truth and reality, entirely averse thereto, *Be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid*, That nothing shall be deemed sufficient evidence of such their consent, but a certificate, signed by two or more Justices of the Peace, in the town where such slave or slaves may reside, to the following purport, *to wit*:

We the subscribers, Justices of the Peace in the town of —, in the county of —, and State of Rhode-Island and Providence Plantations, do hereby certify all persons whom it may concern, that —, a slave, about — years of age, heretofore belonging to —, and usually serving — in this town, hath appeared before us at two several times, three days asunder, in the absence of — owner, and, under no apparent restraint or duress, hath fully at each time declared — consent to be sold to —, of the State of —, in the county of —, and town of —, and to be forthwith carried to said town to reside with the said — in a state of slavery. Witness our hands. Dated this — day of —, in the year of our Lord —.

Provided always, That in case any Negro or Mulatto slave shall become notoriously unfaithful and villainous, and the owner or owners thereof shall alledge and make proof of the same, at the General Sessions of the Peace, in the county where such slave or slaves reside, and obtain judgment against him or them, it shall and may be lawful for the owner or owners to export said delinquent slave or slaves to any place within the jurisdiction of the United States. And a copy

of the said judgment, annexed to the bill of sale, shall justify his or their exportation accordingly.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That no person, owner of any slave or slaves in this State, shall sell or dispose of him or them to be carried out of the State, on any pretence whatever, contrary to the true intent and meaning hereof; and that if any person or persons in this State shall be lawfully convicted of selling or disposing of any such slave or slaves, in manner as aforesaid, he or they shall forfeit and pay the sum such slave or slaves shall be valued at; the one half thereof to and for the use of this State, and the other half to and for the use of the informer who shall prosecute the same; to be tried and recovered before any court of law in this State proper to try the same.

State of RHODE-ISLAND and PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS. *February Session, 1784.*

An ACT authorizing the manumission of Negroes, Mulattoes and others, and for the gradual abolition of slavery.

WHEREAS all men are entitled to life, liberty and the pursuit of happiness, and the holding mankind in a state of slavery, as private property, which has gradually obtained by unrestrained custom and the permission of the laws, is repugnant to this principle, and subversive of the happiness of mankind, the great end of all civil government:

Be it therefore enacted by this General Assembly, and by the authority thereof it is enacted, That no person or persons, whether Negroes, Mulattoes or others, who shall be born within the limits of this State, on or after the first day of March, A. D. 1784, shall be deemed or considered as servants for life, or slaves; and that all servitude for life, or slavery of children, to be born as aforesaid, in consequence of the condition of their mothers, be and the same is hereby taken away, extinguished and forever abolished,

And

And whereas humanity requires, that children declared free as aforesaid remain with their mothers a convenient time from and after their birth; to enable therefore those who claim the services of such mothers to maintain and support such children in a becoming manner, *It is further enacted by the authority aforesaid,* That such support and maintenance be at the expence of the respective towns where those reside and are settled: *Provided however,* That the respective Town-Councils may bind out such children as apprentices, or otherwise provide for their support and maintenance, at any time after they arrive to the age of one year, and before they arrive to their respective ages of twenty-one, if males, and eighteen, if females.

And whereas it is the earnest desire of this Assembly, that such children be educated in the principles of morality and religion, and instructed in reading, writing and arithmetic: *Be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid,* That due and adequate satisfaction be made as aforesaid for such education and instruction. And for ascertaining the allowance for such support, maintenance, education and instruction, the respective Town-Councils are hereby required to adjust and settle the accounts in this behalf from time to time, as the same shall be exhibited to them: Which settlement so made shall be final; and the respective towns by virtue thereof shall become liable to pay the sums therein specified and allowed.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That all persons held in servitude or slavery, who shall be hereafter emancipated by those who claim them, shall be supported as other paupers, and not at the separate expence of the claimants, if they become chargeable; provided they shall be between the ages of twenty-one years, if males, and eighteen years, if females, and forty years, and are of sound body and mind; which shall be judged of and determined by the Town-Councils aforesaid.

State of RHODE-ISLAND and PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS.

Paragraphs of an Act passed October, 1785.

BE it further enacted, That every Negro or Mulatto child, born after the first day of March, 1784, be supported and maintained by the owner of the mother of such child to the age of twenty-one years, provided the owner of the mother shall, during that time, hold her as a slave; or otherwise upon the manumission of such mother, agreeably to the said act, the owner shall be discharged from any further expences of supporting and maintaining such child.

And be it further enacted, That no person held in servitude or slavery, who shall be emancipated, be supported as paupers, provided he or she exceeds the age of thirty years at the time of such emancipation; any thing in the said act contained to the contrary notwithstanding.

Commonwealth of MASSACHUSETTS.

In the Year of our LORD One Thousand Seven Hundred and Eighty-eight.

An ACT to prevent the slave-trade, and for granting relief to the families of such unhappy persons as may be kidnapped or decoyed away from this Commonwealth.

WHEREAS by the African trade for slaves, the lives and liberties of many innocent persons have been, from time to time, sacrificed to the lust of gain:

And whereas some persons, residing in this Commonwealth, may be so regardless of the rights of human kind, as to be concerned in that unrighteous commerce:

Be it therefore enacted by the Senate and House of Representatives in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, That no citizen of this Commonwealth, or other persons residing within the same, shall for himself, or any other person whatsoever, either as
master,

master, factor, supercargo, owner or hirer, in whole or in part, of any vessel, directly or indirectly, import or transport, or buy or sell, or receive on board his or their vessel, with intent to cause to be imported or transported, any of the inhabitants of any State or Kingdom, in that part of the world called Africa, as slaves, or as servants for term of years; and that every citizen, inhabitant or resident as aforesaid, who shall, directly or indirectly, receive on board his or their vessel, with intent to import or transport, or cause to be imported or transported, any of the said inhabitants of Africa, contrary to the true intent and meaning of this act, and be thereof lawfully convicted, shall forfeit and pay the sum of fifty pounds, for every person by him or them so received on board, with intent to be imported or transported; and the sum of two hundred pounds for every vessel fitted out with intent to, and that actually shall be employed in, the importation or transportation aforesaid, to be recovered by action of debt, in any court within this Commonwealth, proper to try the same; the one moiety thereof to the use of this Commonwealth, and the other moiety to the person who shall prosecute for and recover the same.

And it is further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That all insurance which shall be made within this State, on any vessel fitted out with intention as aforesaid, and having on board slaves, in order to be transported from Africa as aforesaid, or upon any slaves so shipped on board of any vessel for transportation, shall be void, and of no effect; and this act may be given in evidence under the general issue, in any suit or action commenced for the recovery of insurance so made.

And whereas divers peaceable inhabitants of this Commonwealth, or residents therein, have been privately carried off by force, or decoyed away under various pretences, by evil-minded persons, and with a probable intention of being sold as slaves without the same; and although sufficient provision is made for
public

public justice, in such case, by the common law, and an act, entitled, " an act establishing the right to, and the form of, the writ *de homine replegiando*," yet no provision is made for bringing actions for damages by the friends or families of any inhabitants who may be so carried off, or decoyed away, during his or her lifetime :

Be it therefore further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That when any inhabitant or resident of this Commonwealth shall be so carried off, or decoyed away, it shall be lawful for any friends of such injured inhabitant or resident, to bring forward and prosecute to final judgment and execution, before any court of law proper to try the same, any action for damages against any person concerned in decoying or carrying off such inhabitant or resident, in the name of such inhabitant or resident, and in the same manner, and to the same effect, as if thereunto fully authorized by letter of attorney from such inhabitant or resident for that purpose: *Provided nevertheless,* such friend prosecuting as aforesaid shall first give to the Judge of Probate, for the county wherein such injured party last dwelt, good and sufficient bond with sureties to the satisfaction of such Judge of Probate, conditioned that such prosecutor shall pay the monies that he may recover in damages as aforesaid to the said injured party, on his or her return to this Commonwealth, if that shall happen by the time when such execution is satisfied, and if not, shall apply such monies to the use and maintenance of the wife, children or family, of the injured party, in proportion, at such periods, and in such way and manner, as the said Judge shall decree best for the interest of such wife, children or family, in the absence of such injured party.

Provided also, and be it further enacted, That in case the defendant who shall be prosecuted, as is provided in and by this act, shall be acquitted by the court before whom the said trial may be, the said court shall not only render up judgment for legal costs, but for such reasonable

sonable damages as the said defendant hath sustained by such prosecution: *Provided also*, That this act do not extend to vessels which have already sailed, their owners, factors or commanders, for and during their present voyage, or to any insurance that shall have been made previous to the passing of the same.

In the *House of Representatives*, March 25, 1788.

This bill having had three several readings, passed to be enacted.

JAMES WARREN, Speaker.

In *Senate*, March 26, 1788.

This bill having had two several readings, passed to be enacted.

SAMUEL ADAMS, President.

Approved, JOHN HANCOCK.

A true copy : Attest,

JOHN AVERY, jun. Secretary.

At a General Assembly of the State of Connecticut, holden at New-Haven, in said State, on the second Thursday of October, 1788.

An ACT to prevent the slave-trade.

BE it enacted by the Governor, Council and Representatives, in General Court assembled, and by the authority of the same, That no citizen or inhabitant of this State shall, for himself or any other person, either as master, factor, supercargo, owner or hirer, in whole or in part, of any vessel, directly or indirectly, import or transport, or buy or sell, or receive on board his or her vessel, with intent to cause to be imported or transported, any of the inhabitants of any country in Africa, as slaves, or servants for term of years, upon penalty of fifty pounds for every person so received on board as aforesaid, and of five hundred pounds for every such

such vessel employed in the importation or transportation aforesaid, to be recovered by action, bill, plaint or information, the one half to the plaintiff, and the other half to the use of this State. And all insurance which shall be made in this State, on any vessel fitted out to the intent aforesaid, employed as aforesaid, or on any slaves or servants shipped on board as aforesaid, for the purpose aforesaid, shall be void; and this act may be given in evidence, under the general issue, in any suit commenced for the recovery of such insurance.

Be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That if any person shall kidnap, decoy or forcibly carry off out of this State, any free Negro, Indian or Mulatto, or any person entitled to freedom at the age of twenty-five years, inhabitants or residents within this State, or shall be aiding or assisting therein, and be thereof duly convicted, he shall forfeit one hundred pounds to the use of this State, to be recovered by bill, plaint or information, presented by any friend of such inhabitant or resident, which he is hereby authorized to do; and the court before whom the trial shall be, shall, in addition to said penalty, on conviction, give to the prosecutor, for the use of such injured inhabitant or his family, if any he have, such sum in damages as they shall judge just and reasonable, to be applied in such way and manner as the court shall direct; and the said prosecutor shall give bond with surety before the said court, for the due application of the sums recovered, before he has execution thereof. Provided that nothing in this act shall operate to prevent persons removing out of this State, for the purpose of residence, from carrying or transporting with them such Negroes or Mulattoes as belong to them, or to prevent persons living within this State from directing their servants out of this State, about their ordinary and necessary business.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That the owner, master or factor, of each and every vessel clearing

clearing out for the coast of Africa, or suspected by any citizen of this State to be intended for the slave-trade, in any part of the world, and the suspicion being declared to the Naval Officer by such citizen on oath, and such information being to the satisfaction of such Naval Officer, shall first give bond with sufficient sureties to the Treasurer of this State in one thousand pounds, that none of the natives of Africa, or any other foreign country, shall be taken on board said ship or vessel during her voyage, with intent to be transported as slaves to any other part of the world.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That all persons who now are, or hereafter shall be, possessed of any child or children born after the first day of March, 1784, and which by law shall be free at the age of twenty-five years, shall within six months from the rising of this Assembly, or within six months after the birth of any such child, deliver or cause to be delivered to the Town-Clerk, of the town where such possessor belongs, the name of such possessor, as also the age, name and sex, of every such child or children, on oath, to the best of his or her knowledge, under the penalty of forty shillings for each and every month's neglect, to be recovered before an Assistant or Justice of the Peace; the one half to the complainant, and the other half to the use of the poor of the town where such child or children live.

A true copy of record: Examined by
GEORGE WYLLYS, Secretary.

State of RHODE-ISLAND and PROVIDENCE PLANTATIONS.

In GENERAL ASSEMBLY, October Session, A. D. 1787.

An ACT to prevent the slave-trade, and to encourage the abolition of slavery.

WHEREAS the trade to Africa for slaves, and the transportation and selling of them into other countries, are inconsistent with justice, and the principles

ciples of humanity, as well as the laws of nature, and that more enlightened and civilized sense of freedom which has of late prevailed. And whereas the General Congress of the United States, in the year of our Lord one thousand seven hundred and seventy-four, taking the said trade into consideration, agreed and resolved as follows: That " We will neither import, nor purchase any slaves imported, after the first day of December next; after which time we will wholly discontinue the slave-trade; and will neither be concerned in it ourselves, nor will we hire our vessels, or sell our commodities or manufactures, to those that are."

Nevertheless, forgetful of the danger which then impended, and inattentive to the principle of justice and sound policy manifested in the aforesaid resolution, a renewal of the African trade for slaves has been entered into by divers inhabitants of this State: For the prevention whereof, *Be it enacted by this General Assembly, and by the authority thereof it is enacted*, That no citizen of this State, or other person residing within the same, shall, for himself or any other person whatsoever, either as master, factor or owner, of any vessel, directly or indirectly, import or transport, or buy or sell, or receive on board their vessel, with intent to cause to be imported or transported from their native country, any of the natives or inhabitants of any State or Kingdom in that part of the world called Africa, as slaves, or without their voluntary consent.

And be it further enacted by the authority aforesaid, That every citizen, inhabitant or resident, as aforesaid, who shall import or transport, or cause to be imported or transported, any of the said inhabitants of Africa, contrary to the true intent and meaning of this act, and be thereof lawfully convicted, shall forfeit the sum of one hundred pounds, lawful money, for every person by him or them so imported or transported; and the sum of one thousand pounds, for every vessel by him or them employed in the importation or transportation aforesaid;

aforesaid; to be recovered by bill, complaint or information, before the Superior Court, or either of the Inferior Courts, within this State: The one moiety thereof shall be paid into the General-Treasury for the use of this State; and the other moiety to and for the use of the person or persons who shall prosecute for and recover the same.

Provided nevertheless, That this act do not extend to vessels which have already failed, their owners, factors or commanders, for and during their present voyage.

A true copy:

Witness,

HENRY SHERBURNE,

Deputy-Secretary.



